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THE PERSPECTIVE AND FOUNDATION OF MY MISSIOLOGICAL RESEARCH

In this article I am asked to share with the readers the main concerns of my missiological reflections, bringing out the context as well as the motivations that influenced me apart from my identity as a Divine Word missionary, articulating also the specificity of the SVD Missiology, if any. I try to respond to the request by saying something about the background of my missiological search, at the same time underlining the contexts and their influence on me and my view regarding the "SVD Missiology."

Background

My theological formation was happily blessed by its coincidence with the beginning of the fruits of Vatican II sweeping down to theological centres and the church at large, and I had the privilege also to be educated by theologians associated with the Council in different ways, including the Council "expert," the late Josef Neuner. Neuner gave a series of lectures as part of the Pune Pontifical Athenaeum's observance of 1966, as the "Extraordinary Jubilee of the Council" that Pope Paul VI had declared. In his lectures, Neuner, apart from outlining the fresh theological grounds that Vatican II had broken, focused on Revelation and the Church and its mission in a religiously pluralistic world, as he was part of the "Drafting committees" of the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et Spes), the Decree on Mission (Ad Gentes) and the Declaration on Religious Pluralism (Nostra Aetate). As a young and enthusiastic SVD I eagerly absorbed the themes of the Church being the Sacrament of the Kingdom and the role of other religions in the Divine plan. This was only to be expected as India is a nation of an immense

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population following different religious traditions with a tiny minority of Christians.

Neuner’s lectures enkindled in me not only the direction of my mission theology, but also the very interest in Missiology as he narrated to us how among all other men available the then Superior General of the Society of the Divine Word, Fr. John Schütte, was made the Pro-President of the Ad Gentes’ Drafting Committee and how Schütte with his insights and leadership ensured a very successful document that received probably the highest positive votes, despite the short notice with which the Mission Commission carried out its task.

As I learned more about the mission spirituality of Arnold Janssen, the Founder of the Society of the Divine Word, I was amazed to see how Jansen was way ahead of his times in his mission theology. Already then, in the last quarter of the 19th century, when there was no talk about the Missio Dei, Arnold based his missionary vision on the love of the Father and the life of the Trinity. In the Rule of 1898, that was a reformulation of the 1876 Rule, he wrote: “Let us be faithful sons of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, but not least of the Father Who is the root Principle of the Blessed Trinity and to Whom all are to return . . . Let us propagate His Kingdom of love on earth and let us work for this, so that the best of fathers be more and more loved in the Son and in the Holy Spirit” (Rule 1898/5; emphasis added). Mission within the Trinity was the very foundation of Arnold Janssen’s missionary vision and in this he anticipated Vatican II.1 When the rest of the church was concerned about saving souls rushing to the fires of hell, Arnold spoke about the propagation of the Kingdom of God’s love! This cast in me the seeds of constructive creativity and the search for relevance.

Similarly, Arnold’s love for the Word taught me to have a biblically inspired Missiology. Arnold’s biblical realism enabled him to appreciate the cultures of the world and he exhorted his missionaries to learn these cultures, contrary to the spirit of the times that worked for civilization of the savages! I am convinced that only if we are deeply rooted in the Scripture can we be truly creative. The roots of our mission are in the Scripture. Only a comprehensive grasp of the Word of God can enable us to respond adequately to the contemporary challenges with responsiveness. We are accountable to the present in the light of the past memory, nourishing hope. For this we must not only listen to God’s word in the Scripture, but also to God’s word spoken through the modern world, which the late Pope John XXIII named “the signs of the times.” Theology is a dialogue of speaking the Word and listening to the World. Gaudium et Spes expresses it: “The Church labours to decipher authentic signs of God’s presence and purpose in the happenings, needs and desires of the people of our age” (GS 11).

Experience-based Theology

Accruing from what is said above is the role of experience in theological method. Experience is of central importance in theological reflection as it renders the dimension of space to the theological context and becomes the locus of theologizing. Experience along with the context leaves us with an impression that enables us to understand more closely the Word of God, making us participative in the unfolding of the Word in the given reality. Our senses become very much involved in theologizing as they contribute to a better understanding of the Word and spell out further aspects of the Word that may not be spoken about in theological systems built with little experience of the reality that is spoken about, with no attention paid to the context in which the Word is to be read. Part of my experience is the religiosity of the vast majority of Indians that I experienced, beginning with my own immediate neighbours, and this I have outlined in the Introduction to my book The Abba Experience.2 This experience of the intense religiosity and religious commitment of my fellow Indians made me an ardent seeker of the relation between the church and the followers of other religious traditions and Christian mission in that context.

Another aspect of my experience, equally important, is the dehumanized existence of a sizable portion of the Indian/Asian population. Intolerably dehumanizing caste practices, utter poverty making human beings to fight with stray dogs at dump-pits, or assisting a hunger-stricken young mother collapsed by the side of the road with her three small children crying helplessly, patients dying an untimely death due to inability to afford life-saving treatment, the sight of a huge number of people making railway platforms and other public places their night shelter, and similar experiences have cast their spell on me driving me to be distrustful of the attempts to reduce Jesus to the hilaristerion to appease an angry God, ignoring the pro-

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thetic ministry of Jesus. This has challenged me to study the ministry of Jesus and its implications for mission today.²

Hailing from a nation with an ancient culture and belonging to an individual church with its own cultural identity and tracing its origins back to the Apostle Thomas, it is natural that I study the relation between the Gospel and culture and the significances of local theologies and of local church. The church is Catholic not only because it is spread everywhere but equally because it has to be reinterpreted and reshaped in every culture.

All these things helped to germinate in me a spirit of search, not satisfied with repeating what has been said by many, frequently churning out dogmatic and traditional positions, based on the bible—particularly the four gospels—so that the Christian community, especially the Asian church, could respond to its mission in the spirit of Gaudium et Spes. In this I was strengthened by the Vatican Council’s bold affirmation of the freedom to the church’s own intellectual life: “In order that such persons may fulfill their proper function, let it be recognized that all the faithful, clerical and lay, possess a lawful freedom of inquiry and of thought, and the freedom to express their minds humbly and courageously about those matters in which they enjoy competence” (GS 62).

Ministry-centred Approach to Jesus

I was convinced that to be relevant and faithful in our service to the world of our times we must return to the Jesus of the gospels, particularly to his ministry,³ and the ministry of Jesus has to be seen from the Jewish expectations of the times. Though Israel was restored to its own land from the Babylonian exile under Cyrus, it continued to experience suffering under foreign rule, interpreted as a punishment for its sins. Hence the promise of forgiveness spoken by the exilic prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel continued to ignite the mind of Israel, causing the post-exilic prophets to speak of liberation still to be completed.⁴ It is against this background that Jesus announced that God’s reign is at hand (Mk 1:14) and made it the very core of his mission.

The advent of the divine reign in Jesus was not a matter of abstract ideas or the inauguration of a new religion as the exclusive vehicle of eternal salvation, but was the pinnacle of Israel’s story and its climax, its decisive moment.⁵ At the same time Jesus was gripped by a strong sense of vocation by God whom he experienced as “Abba,” implying a specific role as the Son. In this sense his mission was manifesting the Father (Jn 12:45; 14:9), through his service to human beings. Accordingly we can speak of the Abba-experience of Jesus as the model and motive for Christian service today.⁶ Through his ministry Jesus showed how God is a compassionate and other-centred Abba of all humans, including those whom Israel considered as Gentiles, and God’s dealings with humans was an uninterrupted saga of love beginning with creation (Mk 12:1-9 and par) which is presented also in terms of a wedding feast that God prepared for human beings (Mt 22:1-14). Jesus becomes the indiscriminate hospitality of God.

Hence mission is an ecstasy of God, God’s standing out of God’s own self to reach out to the other, as we experience it in the ministry of Jesus. In him we come across God’s hopes and dreams for humanity. God affirmed Jesus’ ministry by raising him from the dead (Acts 2:24) as God had affirmed him at the time of his baptism in the Jordan and at the time of his transfiguration (Mk 9:7). This becomes clear only when we realize that Jesus was killed (Acts 2:23) precisely for his ministry (Acts 2:22-23; 10:34-39; Mk 3:6 and par). The resurrection becomes the foundation of the Christian community’s existence as it is empowered and sent by the Spirit of God to announce the Good News of the Gospel (Mk 16:8 and 15).⁷

Evangelist Luke framed the Kingdom-ministry of Jesus in the language of the biblical Jubilee (Lk 4:18-19; Lev 25:10-17 & Isa 61:1-2) to emphasize the relation between the poor and the divine reign. The Jubilee was good news to the poor in so far as the Jubilee demanded the return of the land to the original owner and freeing the slaves with sufficient means of livelihood. It was a divine revolution to retrieve the original equality and fraternity, which the Israelites

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⁸ The silence of the awe-struck women in the face of the luminosity of the Resurrected Lord is only temporary.
enjoyed when all had their own fig trees and vineyard (1 Kings 4:25), a symbolic expression of social and economic well-being.

At Jesus' time the poor, the blind, the lame, the bonded, and other disadvantaged people had to eke out a dehumanized existence and had to beg for their livelihood. Jesus not only quoted Isaiah but systematically carried out his claim of ushering in the year of the Lord, through his healing and other symbolic gestures like the oft-repeated all-inclusive table fellowship, thereby manifesting that the poor of any sort are restored to their human dignity and reinstated into the society. Jesus not only cures the leprosy-affected person, but also makes sure that he is re-instated into the society (Mk 1:44). He does not allow human relationships to be derailed due to sickness or bodily problems. His ministry was the definitive divine revolution of recapturing the original equality and acceptance, a society without discrimination and hierarchization.

In sum Jesus' ministry was human-centred rather than God-centred. Though he frequently spoke about the divine rule, God as such figured rarely in his teachings. His very Incarnation was an affirmation of human dignity in so far as through his Incarnation, as Gaudium et Spes emphasized, he united himself with every human person (n 22). His oft-repeated breaking of the Sabbath laws is, in fact, a relativising of the divine in terms of the human person in so far as the Jews considered the Sabbath laws as given by God and thus enjoying absoluteness. Similarly purity-pollution laws too are relativised in terms of the dignity of the human person in so far as he touches the polluting leprosy patients, or allows himself to be touched by the woman with a flow of blood. Restoring the dignity of the human person was the very identity of the Messiah (Lk 7:22-23).

Before we pass to the next section, a word about the understanding of Jesus as the Saviour, interpreting the crucifixion as an atonement, is called for. In traditional scholarship the death of Jesus is a sacrifice, no doubt based on the Pauline understanding of the crucifixion. Though the crucifixion was an act of killing caused by Jesus' ministry, Paul interpreted it as a hilasterion, propitiation and expiation (Rom 3:21-26). Paul's was a time when sacrifice was a common affair and thus Paul used a language that was familiar at his time, but today is more specific, causing a separation of the suffering of Jesus from his ministry.

Similarly, Martin Kähler's oft-quoted description of Mark as "a passion narrative with a long introduction," is a half-truth. It does point to the dominant presence of the passion in Mark, but the Gospel is not a mere introduction to the passion. Rather, as Donald Senior has underlined, "It is the consequence of Jesus' ministry described in the earlier sections of the Gospel." Commenting on Kähler's conclusion, Robert Funk writes: "His assessment has now been reversed by many scholars: The Gospels are collections of parables, and aphorisms, symbolic deeds and miraculous cures, with a passion appendix." Elsewhere Funk points out how the passion narrative is not the first part of the gospels to be developed. Further it is believed that the passion narratives may not even be the first memories of the initial disciples, but the work of scribes trying to lend credibility to the Jesus story by giving minute references to the prophesies and thus most of the passion narrative need not be based on historical memory. All this ties in with the four gospel narratives that present the passion and death of Jesus as inflicted upon Jesus by the religious leaders of the time to destroy him (Mk 11:18).

Some clarification is required on evangelist Matthew's reference to "the cup of blood of the covenant, poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (26:28). This we have to understand in the context of forgiveness in the gospels. As N. T. Wright has stressed, forgiveness is the sign of the return of YHWH, the eschatological times. Through the cup Jesus asserts it is already now. Wright goes on to say how today by and large scholars like Meier, Sanders, Chilton, Crossan and others would link Jesus' death with the Kingdom proclamation and his action in the temple. I would suggest that if we want to talk at all about the salvation from sin that Jesus brought about, it is the overcoming of selfishness. It is a transformation from self-centred to other-centred.

**Christian Service not Targeted against Other Religions**

All these things have huge significance for Christian service today, especially in the context of other religions. Christian mission can no longer be directed against other religious traditions to displace them

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14 Ibid., 105.
or to compete with them. To continue the ministry of Jesus there has to be a community of the followers of Jesus Christ. Hence right from the beginning of his ministry Jesus constituted a community (Mk 3:14 and par) and after his resurrection it is sent to continue the process of discipleship (Mk 16:7). In fact Jesus wanted a community of disciples in every culture (Mt 28:19-20). Sentness is the very identity of this community: "As the Father has sent me, so do I send you" (Jn 20:21).

Though there have to be communities in every culture and thus there has to be an intercultural mission at all times, there is no indication that all human beings are to be brought into this community or all other religions are to be displaced by this community. Paul, the greatest of all evangelists in the early church, after having given rise to a few communities in the Roman empire, claims that he has no more work (Rom 15:25) and that he has proclaimed the Gospel to the end of the (Roman) world, Illyricum! However, Paul did not see himself at war with other religions. In fact to the end he saw himself to be a Jew (Acts 28:17) even as the earliest Christian community continued to be Jewish (Acts 3:1ff). For that matter Jesus himself was a Jew, though a countercultural one who did not tolerate the dehumanizing and marginalizing interpretations of the Law.

The Church's relation to other religions has to be one of dialogue, as the church cannot accomplish by itself the divine reign in the modern world, but needs the collaboration of all. No wonder that the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences has held right from its inception in 1974 that a triple dialogue is the identity of the Asian church: dialogue with the religions of Asia, with the cultures of Asia and with the poor of Asia.15

The starting point of this triple dialogue is that every human person and every reality is permeated by the Mystery of the Word that the evangelist John presents as the Pre-existing Word (1:1) in whom God creates everything and who enlightens all human beings (Jn 1:3-4, 9). The Bible provides the link between Jesus Christ and universal connectedness and relationship in so far as Jesus Christ is seen as the incarnation of the divine Wisdom. The ancient Christian hymns such as Jn 1:1-18; Col 1:15-20, Phil 2:6-11 and others identify Jesus with the divine Wisdom of the Old Testament.

According to Prov 8:25-30, wisdom is God's essence and in the created order wisdom is that which from chaos makes cosmos, that is order. God and the universe belong to each other intrinsically. All human beings live in divine Sophia. Wisdom is the humanity of God and humans are the divinity of creation. This is the basis of all Christian humanism and interfaith dialogue.16 The early Christian community identified Jesus with wisdom, thereby identifying Jesus with wisdom’s care for the oikos, the household of all creation. We can detect this identification of Jesus as divine wisdom in Paul (1 Cor 3:18-22; Col 1:15-20; Eph 3:14-16); in Matthew (11:19), in John (1:1-18) and in Luke (7:35). Bruce Vawter has noted that the oldest Christology may well be the one based on these wisdom categories.17 This has profound significance for our understanding of other religious traditions in the context of Christology. They are also recipients of divine revelation through creation and enlightenment in the Word/Wisdom.

Though the mystery of the Word was operative in the world all through its history, The Word becomes Incarnate in Jesus so that humans can experience God’s love, the human face of God in the fullest form in Jesus (Jn 12:45; 14:9). This has to continue through his disciples by their becoming God’s presence, Emmanuel (Mt 1:23), for all times, while remaining a “little flock” (Lk 12:32). Its littleness does not compel it to dilute its missionary identity by imposing on others its identity claiming they are “anonymous Christians.” To be a Christian is to follow the Incarnate Word in his mission, and the Incarnate Word becomes Christ through his ministry, death and resurrection (Acts 2:22-36). Though the reality of the mystery of the Pre-existent Word and the Incarnate Word is the same, the mission is different. Hence it is not a question of introducing a separation in Jesus Christ, between the Pre-existent Word and the Incarnate Word, but realizing how Christ and Christian are constitutive to the identity of the followers of the Incarnate Word.

We can enrich ourselves from our dialogue with the followers of other religions in so far as they are bathed with the mystery of the Pre-existent Word, and the divine mystery is so immense that no religion can have an exclusive or exhaustive grasp of it. In fact authors like David Tracy, Francis Clooney and others suggest that we need a comparative theology, that is, we need to develop Christian the-

ology in the light of our understanding of other religious scriptures as well and not only in the light of the bible. Similarly, though Christians inherit the ministry of the Incarnate Word, they do not have an exclusive monopoly over God’s mission, which could very well be understood as shared also by the followers of other religious traditions in so far as they participate in divine creation and revelation through the Word. All this falls in line when we realize how, as the mission decree Ad Gentes affirms, at the root of all is the all-embracing divine love (AG 1-6). Creation, Incarnation and the mission of the church are part of the one divine plan without any discontinuity or disruption. True, the bible shows how a particular people is prepared to bring forth the Messiah whose mission is entrusted to a community without in any way alienating the rest of humanity (Am 9:7). Christian mission must be anchored in a metaphysical humility in so far as the missioner recognizes the limitations and perfectibility of his/her religious tradition apart from the receptivity of Truth by others.

In a sense we Christians have no business being worried about the salvation of others, or the validity of other religions, but being engaged in the mission entrusted to us, as God is the Saviour of all humans (1 Tim 2:4-5). We are called to be the salt of the earth and light of the world and that must be. In this Jesus made love, concern for the neighbour the focus of the community’s mission (Lk 10:25-37; Mt 25:31-46). This was the gist of the ministry of Jesus Christ.

This is a challenge for us to move away from the talk of “mission ad gentes,” i.e., the non-Christians out there, in the former colonies. Our “frontier” is no longer between the Christian world and areas of other faith traditions, but lies somewhere between the prevalence of the kingdom and the absence of it, which can be anywhere in the world. Ultimately it is the human heart that is to be transformed and renewed. It is a mission without frontiers determined by culture, religion, or geography. In this we need the collaboration of all and accordingly we can speak of mission inter religiones, i.e., entering into dialogue with the followers of other religious traditions for the sake of realizing the reign of God.

**Kingdom Service**

The divine methodology involved in the two crucial divine interventions in the bible is of the same character: the wholistic welfare of God’s people. The first intervention led to the settling of the Israelites, the former slaves, whose affliction God had seen and whose cry God had heard (Ex 3:7), on a land flowing with milk and honey where “all had their own fig tree and vineyard” (1 Kings 4:5). The second intervention is summed up in the language of the divine reign, when the blind see, the lame walk, the bounded are set free and thereby the poor experience the good news of the Kingdom (Lk 4:17-18). Today when millions go hungry or are eking out a life denied of their human dignity, the church’s mission cannot be much different from the praxis of Jesus.

The ministry-centred approach to Jesus brings us face to face with the poor of our times since the poor were at the centre of his proclamation: “the poor have the good news preached to them” (Lk 7:22). As Jon Sobrino has pointed out, the Mystery of God and Christ is being revealed in relation to the poor primarily and hence we can understand the significance of the church’s ministry to the poor. It is in relation to the Mystery of God that we have to situate mission and the poor. It is decisive to the historical essence of the church. Here we have the missionary nature of the church and the poor. As Jürgen Moltmann has written: “It is not the Church that has a mission, but the reverse. Christ’s mission creates itself a Church. The mission should not be understood from the perspective of the church but the other way round.” And we have seen how Christ’s mission is basically a good news to the poor. Hence the missionary nature of the church gears it to the service of the poor as its main concern and identity.

Interestingly, breaking the bread was of such key significance to Jesus that the evangelists recall how Jesus broke bread with others even after the resurrection (Lk 24:30-31; Jn 21:13). Christians are a bread-breaking community, seeking justice for all. All our activities of prayer, campaign, protest, advocacy, life-style and our very existence must be a process of bread-breaking.

In the biblical tradition this can be characterised as prophetic mission in so far as all the biblical prophets, speaking for God, speak on behalf of the poor and Jesus’ own self-perception was primarily that of a prophet (Mk 6:4, par). The sum of the prophetic message is, according to Dominic Crossan, God wants righteous justice to rule not only the land of Israel, but all the earth. Jesus was a prophet of the human person and his mission was a manifestation as to how God is

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glorified when human beings are fully alive. He manifested God through his manifesting of the human person.

The gospels show that the concept of poverty cannot be restricted to economic poverty alone. More so it includes the voiceless, those who hunger and mourn for justice and righteousness, who are exploited, the powerless and similar people (Mt 5:3-12). The Christian community cannot tolerate the exclusion of the poor from human dignity and a part in the decision-making process. At the heart of the church’s involvement with human liberation is the Christian faith in the truth that humans are created in the image of God and God has entered into a covenant relationship with all human beings. This human dignity calls for certain rights and freedoms that enable humans to live as humans. Accordingly, the United Nations’ Declaration of Human Rights 1948 is a major “sign of the times” for Christians to respond.

The poor are not just objects of Christian service, but have a lot to offer for the world of our times: their trust in God and the spirit of forbearing and their undying hope. Hence the Asian bishops speak of the need to enter into dialogue with the poor of Asia.

Culture and Local Church

Another dimension of the creative mission of the Word is that all cultures and local identities are permeated by the creative action of the Word. Though culture as such is human-made, in so far as the human nature created by God can unfold only through a culture, it has an autonomy, rendering individuality to every culture and identity to every human person. The Incarnation of the Word is an affirmation of every culture and through his becoming a Jew Jesus underlines the need for every human person to belong to a cultural community. Simultaneously, in so far as human beings are limited and culture is human-made, every culture can have negative and life-denying elements due to which we see the Lord Jesus as a counter-cultural Jew, transforming the Jewish culture along with his identification with the same culture. Culture renders meaning and relevance to all that we encounter.

The message of the divine reign that Jesus asked the community of the disciples to bear witness to, has to become incarnate in every

culture, and go through a process of enculturation, leading to the birth of an authentic local church in the new community. Though the Apostolic community affirmed this theological principle (Acts 11:1-29), in the course of history due to various historical influences, this principle became rather embedded in ashes. However, after Vatican II there is a new awakening of the significance of culture which made Pope Paul VI declare: “[A] Church toto orbe diffusa would become an abstraction if she did not take body and life precisely through the individual Churches,” “... individual Churches made up of such or such an actual part of mankind [sic], speaking such and such a language, heirs of a cultural patrimony, of a vision of the world, of an historical past, of a particular human substratum” (Evangelii Nuntiandi 62). Yet in the Catholic Church this vision to a large extent remains in the ideal order due to resistance and the domineering imposition of uniformity, not to speak of other factors like the dynamic character of culture and the growing globalization process.

This suggests how every church is a local church and no local church can impose its theology as universal theology over others, however strong the tendency is. Doctrinal and theological views developed following a particular philosophical system, however great it is, need not be repeated everywhere at all times. The Council of Nicea shows how Christianity can adapt itself to a new culture and philosophy. Thus a religion that was born and nourished in the Hebrew religious culture and thought pattern becomes at home in the world of the Greek mind and Greek philosophy. Concepts like person, nature, and substance become natural to the new Christian thinking. Homoousios (consubstantial), a term that occurs nowhere in the Bible, but was introduced by emperor Constantine for political purposes, becomes central to Christian faith. As Claude Geffré has argued, it was possible for Christianity because it is a religion based on Incarnation, the kenosis of God manifesting God’s other-centeredness. Like Constantine’s, genuine attempts of understanding Jesus Christ in any culture, leading to following him and enabling others too in that culture to do so, must be acceptable to God. Pluralism in theology is the natural consequence of pluralism of cultures, pointing also to the infiniteness of the divine mystery.

The emphasis on local church and local theology is a matter of concern not only for the churches in Asia and Africa, but even to the churches in the west. To a large extent the recent crisis of the churches in the west can be traced to the inability of these churches

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to incultrate themselves to the times. As I am currently teaching in an Australian university, I would suggest that the tapering off in church attendance and the shrinking of the institutional church in Australia, something common to the western churches, to a large extent can be traced to the failure of the Australian church to adapt itself to the core values of Australia, such as the sovereignty of the people, freedom of religion, freedom of speech, equality of all under the law, a commitment to the common good and to the Declaration of Universal Human Rights. Inculturation of the Australian church may require a new way of administration as well in facing some of the issues like the collapse of the number of priests. I am inclined to think that the shortage of priests can become a sign of the times if responded to creatively, and can revitalize the Australian church if it refrains from inadequate steps like the importing of foreign priests. The prophetic and critical edge of the Gospel imperative must shine out through the community’s engagement in political and public life, with a counter-cultural stand. The preoccupation with homosexuality and gay marriage must give way to justice and compassion, leading to involvement with the outcasts and the defenceless.

The church becomes catholic by making itself present in all cultures and allowing itself to be moulded by these cultures and thus becoming a dynamic, unsettling presence from within every culture as the salt, light and leaven to the culture.

“SVD Missiology”

The last question I wish to take up is, if there is a specific SVD Missiology. To begin with, the Prologue to the Constitutions of the Society makes it very clear that the Society has its origin and end in the mission of the Incarnate Word, sent by God—His life is our life, his mission our mission. Speaking about religious life in the church, Vatican II insisted on the universal call to holiness in the church and expounded how the religious share in the same mission of the church, though differently expressed (LG 40). Religious commitment is a re-commitment of the baptismal commitment, to live it more deeply and dynamically (LG 44; PC 5). Unlike some other religious orders, the Society of the Divine Word does not have a special spirituality, but it re-lives the authentic ecclesial spirituality, i.e., the missionary spirituality.

It follows that there cannot be anything like an “SVD Missiology.” True, Arnold Janssen by divine providence referred to the Trinitarian

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Kingdom-centred approach to mission, that challenges us to work always for transformation and renewal (conversion), which in some cases can lead to baptism.\(^{30}\) John Fuellenbach's writings on the Kingdom in the mission and spirituality of the church have been well appreciated. In missiology a book that has become a classic is *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today*, by Stephen B. Bevans and Roger P. Schroeder (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books 2004). No doubt, there are very many other SVDs who have contributed to Missiology through their writings and other initiatives, like that of Engelbert Zetler, the founder of *Ishwani Kendra*, Pune, and the first Secretary of the FABC Mission Commission, and Karl Müller who, apart from his writings brought out a Dictionary of Missiology.\(^{31}\) All of these have had a benchmark-raising impact on missiology.

**Conclusion**

In this article I have not given an exhaustive presentation of the SVD contribution to missiology. I am aware also that much could be said about the Spanish and German-speaking SVDs, not to mention others writing in other languages like Indonesian and the role of many SVD journals, especially that of *Verbum SVD*. What I have outlined could introduce the reader to the leading tendencies and directions of SVD participation in missiology. One observation with which I wish to conclude is that the post-modern rejection of Christianity as a meta-narrative may affect only a particular form of Christianity, with its exclusivism and triumphalism, whereas the SVDs in different parts of the world are trying to make the message of Jesus Christ meaningful for our times and contexts, offering hope, through their search for relevance with an attitude of openness and solidarity.

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